



Marla S. Moore  
Director

## Judicial Council of Georgia Administrative Office of the Courts

### PRESS RELEASE

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**Press Contact**  
Maggie Reeves  
404.463.0350 (o)  
317.695.3371 (c)  
[maggie.reeves@gaaoc.us](mailto:maggie.reeves@gaaoc.us)

### **Fulton County Task Force Recommends Many Improvements to the Courts**

(Atlanta) The Fulton County Court Improvement Task Force, formed in November 2011 by the Chief Judges of the Fulton County Superior and State Courts, released its final report and recommendations in a public meeting on Friday. Task Force members highlighted the critical need for innovation in the courts and the themes of the recommendations – customer service, transparency, accountability, budget independence, collaboration, and elimination of redundancies.

Mr. Bill Barwick, former President of the State Bar of Georgia and Chair of the Task Force introduced the Task Force members, including business leaders, Fulton County Commissioners, court staff and elected officials, and staff consultants from the Administrative Office of the Courts.

“With the largest court system in Georgia, Fulton County must meet court user needs in an accessible, efficient, and fair manner,” the Task Force report reads. “But, like trial courts throughout the state and the nation, the Fulton County courts struggle to deliver optimal services under tightening budgets.” Mr. Barwick emphasized that the courts impact all citizens at some point – through business litigation, family proceedings, jury duty, as a crime victim, or as a taxpayer.

However, the courts’ outdated infrastructure and cultural tensions have limited their ability to provide adequate customer service or effectively utilize taxpayer dollars. Ms. Rita Sheffey, past-President of the Atlanta Bar Association, and Vice-Chair of the Task Force also alluded to the December 2005 U.S. District Court order, which places constant pressure on the courts to reduce the jail population.

The report states, “Realizing the need for modernization and more cost-effective processes and systems, Fulton County Superior Court Chief Judge Cynthia D. Wright and State Court Chief Judge Patsy Y. Porter agreed that the courts could use help in charting a path for the future. The judges gathered a group of knowledgeable, trusted stakeholders to form the Fulton County Court

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Improvement Task Force. The Task Force’s primary goal was to anticipate demands on the judicial system and recommend how best to prepare for those demands with respect to court organization, jurisdiction, and operations.”

The Chief Judges created the Task Force to identify the existing problems in the system, find solutions, and plan for future needs using national best practices and data from well-performing courts. Especially important due to jail overcrowding and decreasing county budgets, these recommendations, if implemented, will allow the courts to serve Fulton County efficiently and effectively during coming years.

While the primary products of the Task Force’s work are the recommendations contained in the report, the process also has resulted in improved relationships among the three branches of government and re-invigorated judicial leadership and coordination among the state and superior court benches.

The full report can be found online at [www.georgiacourts.gov/fultontaskforce](http://www.georgiacourts.gov/fultontaskforce).

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